

*Presbyterianism
U. S. A.*

S J Baird

A TRIBUTE

TO

PRESBYTERIANISM

A

BICENTENARY SERMON

In commemoration of the labours and their results, of the celebrated
Assembly of Divines and others, which met at Westminster,
London, July 1, 1643.

PREACHED TO THE CONGREGATION

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEWTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

On Sabbath Morning, July 2, 1843.

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PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.  
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P R E F A C E .

THIS sermon was [prepared in accordance with the general recommendations of the Supreme Judicatories of the Presbyterian, and other affiliated Churches, in Europe and America. From the Assembly of Divines and others, which met at Westminster, in London, in July 1, 1643, nearly all the Presbyterians, who speak the English language, in various parts of the world, have derived their Formularies of Christian doctrine and Church government, and many of their most important principles of religious and civil liberty. It was deemed highly expedient, therefore, to have the two hundredth anniversary of their meeting commemorated by all our churches, and on that occasion, that all our Ministers be recommended to bring before their respective congregations, some appropriate notice of the labours and their results of this most illustrious Assembly. The preacher of this sermon, felt it to be his duty and his happiness, to endeavour to comply with a recommendation so reasonable, so important, and so solemn. He did not prepare this sermon, however, with the most distant idea of its being published. But several of the leading members of the congregation having expressed an anxious desire to have the facts and principles it contains more extensively circulated in this community, and having ordered a large number of copies, it is therefore respectfully submitted to the public in this form, with the earnest hope, that it may be instrumental in the promotion of those great principles of

truth and righteousness, which have ever been so dear to a large portion of the Presbyterian world.

Without the least desire to assail or to undervalue other Christian denominations, it is to be hoped, that all will be disposed to give to the Presbyterians, at least on such an occasion as this, that privilege to maintain and defend their own views of divine truth, which all denominations severally claim for themselves. To the liberal, the candid, and the truth-seeking, and to the much endeared Congregation to which it was delivered, this sermon is therefore respectfully offered.

A TRIBUTE
TO
PRESBYTERIANISM.

PSALM cxii. 6.

Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.

It is the dictate of reason, gratitude and religion, to trace the progress of divine and human events, and to mark the influence of their development upon the welfare of the human race. That man is strangely ignorant of the first principles of knowledge and wisdom, who is not disposed to examine the records of divine revelation, and the history of the human family, with the most critical attention. He is surely most forgetful of that grateful feeling and devout remembrance which should ever fill the bosom of a thinking and religious man with gratitude and praise to God, for all the various and striking interpositions of his Providence in the affairs of men.

"Know thyself," is not merely a maxim of the wisdom of ancient Greece. It is no less a dictate of common sense, and of the purest, the most sublime Christianity. That man makes but little proficiency in the knowledge of man, or in the study of that happiness of which he is susceptible, who does not commence his investigations with a careful and elaborate examination of his own mental and moral exercises. But if his knowledge would be comprehensive and definite, he must enlarge the boundaries of his observation. He must look upon the varied development of thought and feeling around him. He must look upon the past, and contemplate the legitimate influence of those essential principles of truth and righteousness, which God originally gave to the human race, and which he has again so often repeated on the pages of Inspiration and in the history of the world, with the most solemn sanctions and fearful retributive punishments. It has ever, therefore, been a mark of wisdom and religion to consider and commemorate the virtues and actions of the good and the illustrious dead: and to pay special attention to those particular periods in the history of

mankind, when the germs of a moral and intellectual immortality have begun to develope their nature, and to expand their powers, with an extraordinary vigour and certainty, for the temporal and eternal welfare of the great family of man. The founding of nations, the revolutions of kingdoms, the birth of illustrious men, and the fearless and successful promulgation of those principles of religion and liberty that are inseparably connected with the welfare of the human family, have ever claimed the attention, and afforded the most ample instruction, to the lovers of truth, wisdom, and happiness. It is true that this invaluable means of instruction has often been perverted and devoted to the purposes of a blind superstition, and a heartless formal religion. The Romish Calendar, for instance, is filled with feasts, fasts, and festivals, for almost every day in the year, in commemoration of the canonized trumpery of centuries of superstitious ignorance and antichristian impiety. But it is the commemoration of *principles*, and not of men, and times, and seasons, which we advocate. And surely no one will pretend to say that such commemorations are calculated to make us worse. Their tendency on the contrary, has always been to perpetuate the truth, to produce a spirit of love and ardent devotion to principle, to lead men to consider the future, and to disregard present sufferings whenever truth and duty demand the sacrifice. Hence, the true Christian has ever loved to ponder upon the eventful themes of divine revelation, and the frequent thrilling events in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ. How his heart beats with the fondest hopes, and swells with the most ardent desires, when he beholds the amazing love for a perishing world, of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary! How he feels his faith strengthened, and his hopes established, when he looks upon such men as Paul, and Luther, and Calvin, and Cranmer, and Knox, and other illustrious men who laid again the foundations of our religious and civil liberties!

We are called, therefore, Christian brethren and friends, in the good providence of God, to consider on the present occasion the labours and results of a body of Christian men, who have exerted an untold influence upon the Protestant world, and upon millions of the general family of mankind. And it is my most sincere prayer to God, that with the ten thousands of our Israel who may this day be assembled together in various parts of the world, we may all find our investigations precious and profitable: and that we may all prove in relation to such men, in the language of the text,

with the Psalmist of old, "Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance."

I. In order to have a proper understanding of our appropriate theme this morning, let me call your attention, therefore, in the *first* place, to an examination of those circumstances that led to the convocation of those memorable men, whose eventful transactions we this day commemorate.

It is impossible to form an accurate opinion of any historical event, unless we are acquainted with the attendant circumstances that produced the development of that particular movement. The meeting of the Westminster Assembly is one of those important events in the history of religion and liberty, that demands a particular examination of those circumstances which called it into existence. It was no insignificant assemblage of obscure and ignorant men, and at a time of entire indifference to the nature of their deliberations. On the contrary, they were among the most able and conspicuous men in the ecclesiastical and political movements of English history, and they met together at the summons of a noble people, who were determined to break the cruel shackles of an intolerant and persecuting hierarchy, and one of the most lawless, reckless, and despotic kings England has ever produced. A cursory examination of the state of Protestant christendom, and of England in particular, previous to the meeting of those memorable men whose deliberations we are about to investigate, will sufficiently prove the truth of these statements.

More than three centuries ago, the sledge-hammer of omnipotent truth, wielded by the giant arms of the son of the miner of Eisleben, had been driven with such effect against the doors of the churches, convents and monasteries of papal Germany, that their slumbering inmates began to arouse from the moral sleep of ages of spiritual darkness, and to come forth to the light and liberty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reverberations of these blows of truth and love had penetrated the secluded cloister of every monk, and reached the throne of his Pontifical Holiness in the palace of the Vatican of the seven-hilled city of the ancient Cæsars. The re-animated Bible and the pure principles of primitive Christianity, began to spread with the most astonishing rapidity. In a comparatively short space of time, a great part of Germany, Switzerland, and Holland, had embraced the reformed opinions of Luther, Zuingli, and Calvin. The principles of the Reformation, notwithstanding the bitter opposition and persecutions of the Pope and his allies, soon spread into France, England, Scotland, and Ireland; and

cheered and re-invigorated the Hussites of Bohemia, and the primitive Waldenses of the valleys of Piedmont. The entrance of the Reformation into England, however, was, probably, under the most unfortunate of all possible circumstances. Into nearly every country in Europe into which the Reformation had gone, it had made its way through the native and inherent power of the *truth* upon the minds, and hearts, and consciences of the generality of the people, with but little assistance from temporal power, and all the opposition of kings and bloody men was not able to stop its onward course.

But in England, the Reformed religion had made but little progress, until Henry VIII., a sensual, cruel, and bigoted king, fell out with the Pope in relation to his marriage, and determined to throw off the supremacy of the papal power, and to accomplish his own purposes. Indeed, he had written so severely against Luther, and had persecuted those with so much violence in his own kingdom, who were in favour of the Reformation, that the Pope had written him a special letter of thanks, and given him the pompous title of "Defender of the Faith," which, notwithstanding its equivocal meaning, is still retained by the kings and queens of England to the present day. But all this made no difference. Henry VIII. was determined to prosecute his marriage schemes, whether the Pope was willing or not. The Pope refused, and Henry in a rage separated the Church of England from the dominion of the papal power. He declared *himself* the supreme head of the English Church, instead of the Pope of Rome; and proceeded to the confiscation of monasteries, convents, and other ecclesiastical property, to the amount of several millions of pounds sterling. Every thing was made to conform to his stern despotic will.

As the Reformation was then making rapid advances in almost every other country in Europe, it now seemed a favourable opportunity to make some decided impression on the English people. The king, however, cared but little for the Reformation, and was unwilling to make many alterations in the existing state of Church affairs. Through the influence of Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, he allowed the Bible to be more generally circulated, and was induced to have some of the prayers of the Romish Church translated into English, though he had Tyndall, the first translator of the New Testament into the English language, burnt for this misdemeanor; and though the Reformation had been suffered to make some considerable advances in

his kingdom, he afterwards signed a bill reviving nearly all the objectionable features of popery. It was very evident that he was more than half a papist, and lived and died one of the meanest, the basest, and most tyrannical of mankind. During the reign of his son, Edward VI., the Reformation made much more progress. Forty-two articles of religion, afterwards reduced to thirty-nine, and a book of common prayer, framed from the five Roman Catholic missals of the several dioceses of Sarum, York, Hereford, Bangor, and Lincoln, were composed and appointed to be read in all the churches. Many of the priestly vestments, and much of the pomp and ceremony of the Romish Church were abolished, and the English Church was modeled more in conformity with all the Reformed churches of the continent, who had entirely renounced the antisciptural corruptions of the popish hierarchy, and returned to the Christian simplicity of Apostolic times. All these advances, however, were soon terminated by the untimely death of this young king, and by the accession of his sister, the "bloody Mary," as she is called, who again restored popery in all its power and persecutions. She was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth, who placed herself at the head of the Church, as her father, Henry VIII., had done, and restored ecclesiastical affairs to nearly the same condition in which they were left at the death of her brother, Edward VI. She was determined, however, as she possessed much of the despotic spirit, and many of the popish principles of her royal father, not to indulge the Puritans, who now began to rise in considerable numbers, and who were so called, because they contended for further alterations, and for more primitive purity of Christian doctrine, and worship, and church government. As far as possible, she compelled the strictest uniformity in the use of prayer books, gowns, surplices, and such like, and established the Episcopal hierarchy of archbishops, bishops, priests, and deacons, with many of the trappings and much of the splendid pageantry of the darkest times of popish ignorance and corruption. But notwithstanding her intolerance, and the repeated cruelties and persecutions of her successors, James I. and Charles I., the Puritans continued to increase in numbers and activity, in every part of the kingdom. A very large number of the best divines in the Church, of the nobility, commons, and people of the English nation, were to be found with the Puritans. But the persecutions of James I., whose standing maxim was—"No bishop, no king," and the relentless and barbarous course of the perfidious Strafford, the prime minister of

Charles I., and the persecuting Laud, archbishop of Canterbury, at last brought the parliament and the great body of the English and Scotch nations into open collision with the king, in his despotic measures in church and state. His prime minister and his archbishop lost their heads for their crimes, and their royal master, Charles I., having fallen into the hands of the army, several years after, met with the same fate. The parliament and the Puritans were the advocates of the civil and religious liberties of the people. The king and his party, in church and state, were the staunch defenders of the "divine rights of kings," of "passive obedience" to their despotic power, and of the exclusive and preposterous claims of the Episcopal hierarchy and formalities of the English Church, as then "established by law." The importance of civil liberty and evangelical religion was but little regarded. Scarcely any thing was to be heard of, but the "prerogatives of the king," and the claims of "the Church." Entire submission to the king, apostolic succession, the different orders of the clergy, prayer books, gowns, surplices, saints' days, sports on the Sabbath, and many of the nameless insignia of popery, were insisted upon and enforced with absolute authority. The Puritans were hated, despised, imprisoned, exiled, and in many cases put to death for their primitive principles, and their steady opposition to the shameless coalition of the king and the hierarchy, in the exercise of their cruel domination. As a mere specimen of their persecutions, one or two instances will suffice. Dr. Leighton, for having written a book against the hierarchy, was fined £10,000, or about fifty thousand dollars, and condemned to perpetual imprisonment and whipping. He was afterwards whipped, then placed in the pillory, one of his ears cut off, one side of his nose slit, branded on the cheek with a red hot iron, with the letters SS; whipped a second time and placed in the pillory. A fortnight afterwards, his sores being yet uncured, he had the other ear cut off, the other side of his nose slit, and the other cheek branded. He continued in prison until the long parliament set him at liberty. About four years afterwards, William Prynne, a barrister, wrote a book against the "Sports on the Lord's day," for which he was deprived of his practice at Lincoln's Inn, degraded from his degree at Oxford, set in the pillory, had his ears cut off, was imprisoned for life, and fined £5,000!! Further endurance was impossible. The parliament found it was necessary, in order to rescue the civil and religious liberties of the people, and to save the nation from destruction, to take the affairs of

government into their own hands; and in order to assist in the removal of their oppressive burdens, and to bring about those changes in Christian doctrine and church government for which the Puritans had been contending for nearly a century past, they issued an ordinance, dated June 12, 1643, to convene that body, whose labours and results we are this day called to commemorate.

The struggle between the Parliament, and the king and his adherents, continued for several years, until Cromwell's complete usurpation of executive power in his own hands. Soon after his death, Charles II. was restored to the throne of his father, and the iron heel of insolent despotism again sunk upon a prostrate people in church and state. And to this day many of those same abuses continue to exist in this nation, one of the most remarkable and powerful that has ever existed. Had the Reformation been introduced and established in England by the *puritans* of those times, instead of the *monarchy* and *hierarchy* of the nation, how immensely different would have been the result for the cause of religion and the liberties of mankind! The Anglican Church would not only have been sound in doctrine, primitive in her worship, republican in her government, like all the other churches of the Reformation, but the puritans who have ever contended for these scriptural principles would have been saved from centuries of woful struggles, and the Church of God and the nations of the earth would have been moved by this concentrated power of truth, to the end of time. But the plans and purposes of God were otherwise ordered. He intended that these invaluable principles of religion and liberty should be subjected to the severest fires of persecution; and that the nations of the world should at last admire and appreciate that which he has revealed for their happiness and their salvation, and that which alone has ever been able to give vitality and perpetuity to the Church, and liberty and stability to the political institutions of mankind. The solution of his plans, and the development of these principles, are most intimately connected with the important investigations of the present discourse.

II. In the further prosecution of this subject, therefore, let me call your attention in the *second* place, to the deliberations and character of the Assembly that had been convened by the Parliament.

We shall be able to have a better understanding of their deliberations, and their character, by some attention to the reasons the Parliament gave for their convocation. The

following is a part of the ordinance: "Whereas, among the infinite blessings of Almighty God upon this nation, none is, nor can be more dear to us, than the purity of our religion; and for that, as yet, many things remain in the liturgy, discipline, and government of the Church, which do necessarily require a further and more perfect reformation than as yet hath been obtained; and whereas, it hath been declared and resolved, by the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, that the present church government by archbishops, bishops, their chancellors, commissars, deans, and chapters, archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical officers depending upon the hierarchy, is evil, and justly offensive and burdensome to the kingdom; and therefore, they are resolved that the same shall be taken away, and that such a government shall be settled in the Church as may be most agreeable to God's holy word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the Church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed churches abroad; and for the better effecting hereof, and for the vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the Church of England from all false calumnies and aspersions, it is thought fit and necessary to call an assembly of learned, godly, and judicious divines, who, together with some members of both houses of Parliament, shall confer and treat among themselves of such matters and things aforesaid, as shall be most agreeable to the word of God."

This Assembly met, therefore, according to appointment, in the Abbey Church, in Westminster, London, on Saturday, July 1, 1643, just two hundred years ago yesterday; and was opened with a sermon by Dr. Twisse, the Prolocutor, or Moderator, from John xiv. 18; "I will not leave you comfortless." An immense congregation, and both houses of that illustrious Parliament commonly called the Long Parliament, were present on this momentous occasion. After sermon, the members of the Assembly went into the chapel of Henry VII.; and a few days after, previous to the commencement of their regular duties, each member took the following protestation: "I, A. B., do seriously and solemnly protest, in the presence of Almighty God, that in this Assembly, whereof I am a member, I will not maintain any thing in matters of doctrine, but what I think in my conscience to be truth; or, in point of discipline, but what I shall conceive to conduce most to the glory of God, and the good and peace of his Church."

Sixty-nine ministers and others, the whole of the former having been episcopally ordained, and nearly all of both

sorts being still in the communion of the Church of England, composed the members at the first meeting of this Assembly. By the ordinance which called the Assembly, they were to consist of one hundred and twenty ministers and thirty laymen, of whom ten were peers and twenty commoners: to whom were added at various subsequent periods, fourteen ministers; making the whole number appointed by the Parliament one hundred and sixty-four persons. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, which had embraced the Calvinistic doctrines of the Reformation, under John Knox, and the Presbyterian form of Church government, having been especially requested by the Westminster Assembly, and by the English Parliament, appointed five ministers and three ruling elders as commissioners of the Church of Scotland, to attend the meeting of the Westminster Assembly, which made the members delegated to this body one hundred and seventy-two persons in all. Some of those appointed, appear never to have met with the Assembly, and others only to have attended occasionally; but the majority gave diligent and assiduous attention to the duties to which they had been called in the good providence of God, and have become famous among men and dear to God's people by the name of the WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY.

Here then, at last, the Puritans were about to realize their long cherished hopes. The despotic power of their oppressors had driven the nation to the assertion of their political and ecclesiastical independence. It was no longer the case, that a haughty king, and a proud, persecuting, and intolerant hierarchy, were to ride over the liberties of the English people in church and state. The friends of truth and freedom, were determined to make one more effort to re-establish their principles in the civil and ecclesiastical constitutions of the United Kingdoms. The Parliament retained the management of the affairs of State in their own hands; and an Ecclesiastical Assembly had been summoned to complete the work of Reformation in the British Islands, which Luther and Calvin had commenced on the continent more than a century before. This was, indeed, a memorable movement in the history of religion and liberty! It attracted the attention of the civilized world; and no man can properly understand the progress and development of religious and civil liberty, who has not carefully studied the history of this eventful period. Every thing was calculated to stamp their deliberations with intense interest. Even the very place in which they held their sessions, was surrounded

with the ashes and cenotaphs of monarchs and statesmen, philosophers and divines, poets and historians, and other illustrious benefactors of their country for ages past, whose remains or whose names had been deposited under the grand and towering architecture of Westminster Abbey. Such a movement was scriptural, reasonable, and absolutely necessary, under their peculiar circumstances. It was no novelty to see the ministers and servants of the Church of Christ, assembled together, to deliberate upon her welfare, and to present such an outline of her doctrines and constitution as her situation demanded. Such an Assembly had been held in Apostolic times at Jerusalem. Another had been held at Nice, in Bithynia, in 325, besides many others of less importance, in the history of the Christian Church. Since the commencement of the Reformation, the Westminster Assembly had been preceded by the memorable Augsburg Convocation in Germany, in 1530, which was called to express the religious opinions of the Reformers of that time; and the celebrated Synod of Dort, in Holland, in 1618, which met to settle the Arminian controversy, which then began to agitate the Church, and which has since, to a greater or less extent, affected so many denominations of Christians. But for the piety, learning, and consummate ability of the great body of the ministers, ruling elders, and laymen of this Assembly, it may safely be said, *their superior* has not been convened for a similar purpose, since the meeting of the Apostles, Elders, and brethren, in the Apostolic Assembly at Jerusalem. Those who may be incredulous, will have their doubts removed, if they will but take the trouble to examine their productions, and read the works and the history of the lives and times of such ministers as Baillie, Calamy, Gillespie, Goodwin, Henderson, Lightfoot, Nye, Tuckney, and Twisse, and such ruling elders as Lord Maitland and Lord Warriston, and such laymen as the learned John Selden, one of the most learned men England has ever produced, and Sir Mathew Hale, afterwards Lord Chief Justice of England, and perhaps one of the best and most able judges who ever sat on a judicial bench in any country. This Assembly continued in existence until the 22d of February, 1649, a period of nearly five years and eight months, during which time they held above eleven hundred sessions. Every subject was discussed in a patient and thorough manner. Several weeks were sometimes consumed in the settlement of a single proposition. But they had been called together at an important period, and it was altogether probable, from the nature of their proceedings,

that their discussions and decisions would exert a prodigious influence upon the welfare of the Church and the world for centuries to come. They were, therefore, not only patient and deliberate, but deeply anxious and prayerful: and during their sessions every meeting was opened and closed with prayer, and many special days of fasting and prayer and public preaching, were observed with great solemnity.

After they had spent a considerable time in an attempted revision of the Articles of the Church of England, they abandoned them altogether, and set themselves to work to prepare new Formularies of Christian doctrine and Church government, from first to last. As the result of their labours, they eventually presented to the Parliament a Confession of Faith, in thirty-three chapters, a Larger Catechism containing one hundred and ninety-six questions and answers, a Shorter Catechism containing one hundred and seven questions and answers, a Form of Church Government in twenty-two chapters, a Book of Discipline in eleven chapters, and a Directory for Worship in fifteen chapters. These were approved by the Parliament, and having been adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, as their standards of Christian doctrine and Church government, were declared to be according to the word of God, and to be the authorized Formularies in Christian doctrine and Church government in the kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland; and all others hitherto in use were to be set aside.

These same Formularies were those which governed the early Presbyterians of this country, and with but little alteration were adopted by the Synod of Philadelphia and New York, in May, 1788, the year previous to the formation of our present General Assembly. They were again ratified and adopted by the Assembly in 1821 and 1833, and at the present time are not only the venerated standards of our own Church in the United States, but of nearly all the Presbyterians who speak the English language in every part of the world.

The Westminster Assembly also, among other important labours, paid considerable attention to a metrical version of the Psalms to be used in public and private worship. The version of Mr. Francis Rouse, or Roos, an able member of the Assembly, and also of the Parliament, was carefully examined and revised, and recommended to be used in all the churches. This same version, which was a great improvement upon those which had preceded it, though not so complete as could have been desired, is still continued in

use in many Presbyterian churches to the exclusion of all others.

The Assembly, furthermore, with the Parliament, and immense numbers in England and Ireland, united with the Scotch nation in subscription to the "Solemn League and Covenant," which had been originated by the latter nation, and which Scotland had been compelled to adopt and maintain, in order to save their religion and liberties from perpetual persecution, and final extinction.

I am aware, it is common, with many, to stigmatize the movements of the Covenanters and their friends with every unworthy motive and action. But every man who knows their history, or who loves religion or liberty, cannot but regard them as amongst the most noble defenders of all that is good or great, and, as such, to be entitled to the admiration and gratitude of mankind. They were compelled by the absolute pressure of circumstances, to unite and covenant together for mutual defence and safety. If on any occasion they fell into intolerance or severity, this did not arise from their principles, but from the education of their times and the violence of their enemies. The utmost that can be said against those men, is but trivial, in comparison to the repeated atrocities of their persecutors for more than a century. The Solemn League and Covenant is one of the most remarkable documents in the history of the liberties of the human race, and the struggle attendant upon its maintenance, one of the most heroic and glorious in the annals of civil and religious freedom. But before we dismiss the labours of the Westminster Assembly, it may be well to make a few additional remarks concerning this memorable body. It may be supposed by some, that Presbyterians are ready to imagine they were infallible and immaculate. This is by no means the case. We do not receive or adopt their standards of divine truth because we think them better than the Bible, or because they were such pious, learned, and illustrious men. We simply make them our own, because we believe them to be the most scriptural, logical, comprehensive, and definite exhibition of the doctrines of the Bible, that is to be found in any language: and because from the men who compiled them, and from the times in which they lived, we wish to keep them all "in everlasting remembrance." Neither can it ever be supposed, that we are the advocates of the union of church and state, which then prevailed, and of that intolerance which was sometimes manifested even by Puritans and Covenanters themselves. These were among the faults and evils of the age in which they

lived, and were no part of pure Protestant principles, but some of the most fatal remains of Popery in the churches and nations of Protestant Christendom. The Covenanters and Puritans *were truly great, in spite* of these gigantic evils; and our wonder is not so much that they were at all subject to them, as that they made such prodigious and successful efforts to free the human race from the horrid incubus of popish ignorance, superstition and despotism. It is clear, however, if these enormous evils had been abolished at the time of the Reformation, and Christianity restored to that primitive purity and simplicity in which it came from the hands of Jesus Christ, that its progress and triumphs would have been incalculably great and glorious. Nothing has ever been a greater curse to the Christian Church, both before and since the Reformation, than her union with the state. It has corrupted her ministry, paralyzed her efforts for the conversion of the world, and rendered her, too often, the pliant instrument of a corrupt government. Under the plausible pretence, that they were anxious to secure her best interests, they have robbed her of nearly all that immense influence she is capable of exerting for the happiness of mankind, and appropriated their sacrilegious gains to the aggrandizement of their own base and earthly purposes. Had the Puritans separated the church from the state, and had they laid the foundations of religious and civil liberty in England, as did many of their descendants in our own prosperous Republic in the succeeding century, they would have saved themselves from the exterminating blows which afterwards fell upon their own devoted heads, and peeled and scattered them to distant lands for refuge and a home. But still, it is a great happiness to know that notwithstanding their mistakes and their sufferings, they were the uncompromising advocates of those principles of religion, church government, and civil liberty, which are calculated to overthrow all spiritual and temporal despotism wherever found.

To these same Puritanical principles, according to the well-known English historian, David Hume, is England herself indebted for all the real constitutional liberty she now enjoys. And the distinguished Macaulay, himself an Episcopalian, and at present one of the most conspicuous members of the British Parliament, has declared in relation to this period, "that in this great plague and mortality of constitutions, they took their stand between the living and the dead. At the very crisis of its destiny, at the very moment when the fate that had passed on every other nation,

was about to pass on England, they arrested the danger. So that whatever of political freedom exists either in Europe or America, has sprung directly or indirectly from those institutions which they secured or reformed." Indeed, nothing is more manifest, than that it is to the development of those glorious principles of truth by the descendants of the exiled Puritans, Covenanters, Hollanders, Huguenots, and Quakers, that the United States of America have reached their present prosperity, and are destined, we trust, to exert a reflex influence upon the nations of mankind, until their entire mental, moral, and political emancipation shall be secured. It is no stretch of the imagination to behold the prototype of our own Declaration of American Independence, in the Solemn League and Covenant of Puritanical and Covenanting times. Neither is it at all wonderful, that the children of such men should again lift up the banner of human freedom in this distant land, to which their fathers were driven for their principles, and which they reclaimed from the wilderness and the roaming savage. Their conduct was reasonable and natural, and a triumphant vindication of truth and of the liberties of the human family.

III. But to proceed. A consideration of some of the results of the labours of the Westminster Assembly, will naturally claim our attention in the *third* place.

It cannot be expected that I should enter into a full enumeration of the results of the labours of such an important body, in the short period allowed for our examinations. Neither my time, nor my abilities, are sufficient for the performance of such a pleasing task. Your attention, therefore, will merely be called to a brief outline of what they did for the Church and the welfare of mankind. And permit me here to remark, that it is not my desire to pass any undue eulogy upon these celebrated men, or their measures and their results: and neither is it my intention in the least, to say a single word to the disparagement of other eminent and successful denominations of Christians. This would be entirely uncalled for and improper. But the case is simply this: the Presbyterians in various parts of the world, who have derived their formularies of Christian doctrine and Church government from the Westminster Assembly, feel so well convinced after two hundred years of faithful trial, that these formularies are invaluable, for their exhibition of divine truth, and for their influence upon the spiritual and temporal welfare of the human family; that gratitude to God and these eminent servants of Jesus Christ, and our own special improvement, call on every Presbyterian in the world to cherish the

principles and the memory of those memorable men, and to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of their meeting, by a solemn and prayerful consideration of their imperishable labours and their results. And surely we can do all this without any man-worship, or vain boasting, or depreciation of other bodies of Christians engaged in the same great work of converting the world. My simple desire, therefore, at this time is, to exhibit some of those excellencies of Christian doctrine and Church government that are to be found in our standards, that we may all be led to love them more, and to devote our best energies for their spread throughout the world.

The first subject then, to which I would call your attention is, the Confession of Faith put forth by the Westminster Assembly. The Confession of Faith is a common name by which we designate all our standards both of doctrine and government; but in its primary and particular meaning, it is that exhibition of Bible doctrine contained in thirty-three chapters, and which is always placed first in our standards.

But here at the outset we may be met with the objection that all creeds and confessions of faith are unscriptural and useless. Without any disposition to argue the question, let me ask the objector what is a creed or a confession of faith? A creed or a confession of faith merely means, that such a statement in religious matters, is what a man believes or confesses to be the most important doctrines of the Bible. The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo*, to believe; that is, a man informs us that he believes the Bible teaches certain doctrines which he goes on to specify. This specification may be oral, written, or printed. And in proportion to the *importance* of the truth confessed, is the importance of having such a confession in the most approved and *permanent* form. No man can read the Bible, or any other production, without forming some opinion of what it teaches. This is his creed or confession. Our Confession of Faith is not therefore unscriptural or useless, and is nothing but the necessary and candid exhibition of what we believe to be the main doctrines of the word of God. Confessions of faith were not made to propagate error but to prevent its constant inroads. I have heard persons abuse creeds and confessions by the hour, while at the same time they were giving you nothing but their *own* creed or confession. One of the greatest contradictions to be found, is to hear a man falling out with creeds and confessions, a *part* of whose creed it is to have *no* creed! It is greatly to be feared, that such opposition is not so much against the

creeds and confessions *themselves*, as against the *doctrines* they contain. This is not always the case, but such opposition generally comes from those whose religious opinions are unsettled and erroneous. It is no part, however, of my present business to vindicate creeds and confessions, and to show their scripturality and usefulness. This might be done on some other occasion with great propriety and advantage.

But let us at this time advert for a few moments to an examination of some of the excellencies of our Confession of Faith.

And its first excellence may be stated to be its evangelical, definite, and comprehensive summary of Bible truth. The Holy Scriptures, as the only pure fountain of all truth, are prominently set forth in their native and paramount importance, in the first chapter of our Confession. From this infallible rule of faith, all the successive doctrines of divine revelation are clearly exhibited; and we are fully taught "what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." The sinner here beholds the exhibition of his fall and ruin: he sees his heart and life depicted in their true colours. But the counsels of eternity unfold the cross of Christ—the atonement of Jesus: and the sweet and effectual influences of the Holy Spirit lead the believing repenting sinner to the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." His justification, adoption, sanctification, and complete glorification "in the full enjoying of God to all eternity," are secured from his inseparable union with his risen Lord and Redeemer. All is pre-eminently evangelical, definite, and comprehensive. I am aware this latter excellence is sometimes objected to, and with some apparent plausibility. It is said there is no necessity for being so particular; only a few important truths are necessary to be believed in order to salvation; and that by stating so many, and some of them hard to be believed, we keep a great many persons from our Church, and involve ourselves in much unnecessary controversy. But the Bible either teaches something or nothing: and if it teaches any thing it must be of the utmost importance to mankind, and we cannot therefore be too particular in stating and defending what it does teach. It has ever been the glory of the Presbyterian Church, that she has such a *free* and *full* exhibition of *all* her doctrines, and government, and measures. Nothing is kept back or concealed. It is admitted that only a few of the most important doctrines are necessary to salvation. But the kernel must have a shell, and

the heart a body; and the few essential doctrines of the gospel are intimately and inseparably connected with many others, though not of so much importance. Every thing that God has revealed is worthy to be believed and confessed; and every person who has studied the Scriptures, must have been struck with the important connexion of all the doctrines of the word of God. While we do not expect every person who applies for admission into the Presbyterian Church, to understand or to admit *every* thing contained in our Confession of Faith, it is nevertheless very important to have such a manual for their investigation and study at their leisure. Besides, it is of the utmost importance to have a definite and comprehensive exhibition of Bible doctrine, for the study and subscription of the professed teachers and other officers of the Christian Church. These are to be the guides; and they, surely, ought to have full and explicit instructions for the proper performance of all their solemn duties.

That our doctrines are so definite that many are kept away from our Church, and that we are sometimes involved in much unnecessary controversy in consequence of having such a Confession of Faith, is but too well known. But certainly no one will accuse the Presbyterians of so little *sectarianism*, as to suppose we avowed such doctrines for the *purpose* of keeping so many away from our communion, and then engaging in controversy with them for not uniting with us. It is the strongest possible testimony that can be brought from an external source, to prove, at least, that we are honest and candid in our avowal of what we believe to be truth. And if controversy sometimes arises about our doctrines, it is not so much our fault as the fault of those who attack *us*. You seldom hear other evangelical denominations attacked in a Presbyterian pulpit, though I am sorry to say *we*, as a denomination, are almost "every where spoken against." Our ministers are generally well trained in the doctrines of Christianity, and are satisfied to expound and maintain them in their own pulpits and among their own people. But as they have also been "set for the defence of the truth," if our doctrines or our Church should be unjustly assailed, they are usually able and willing to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." By having such definite doctrines we may not have so *many* members and churches, but those we have will generally understand *what* they believe, and be among the most valuable and substantial to be found.

The second excellence of the Confession of Faith is, its

clear and logical statement of those doctrines usually called *Calvinistic*. Not that John Calvin *fabricated* these doctrines as some seem to suppose; but merely that he was the first since apostolic times to digest in a thorough and complete manner all the important doctrines of the Christian system, and to state and defend them in a uniform connexion. His celebrated "Institutes of the Christian Religion," published when he was twenty-four years of age, in Geneva, in 1533, have been the admiration of every thinking and religious man who has ever read them. There were other writers of considerable celebrity who preceded him, and held many of the same principles; Augustine for instance in the fourth century, and Gotteschalcus a Saxon of noble birth in the ninth century. These were the general theological opinions of all the Reformers besides Calvin, for more than a hundred years after the Reformation commenced, and until James Arminius arose in Holland about the year 1600, and began to broach another system more in accordance with human nature. It cannot be expected, of course, that on such an occasion as this we should enter into an elaborate examination of all these doctrines, and defend them from the many charges that are so repeatedly brought against them. This is done in the usual course of public preaching; and would necessarily consume a great deal of time if we were to attempt it at present.

A consideration of the third and *chief* excellence of the Confession of Faith may, however, be of some service to those who have any difficulties about any of our doctrines, that is, if they are disposed to pay respect, and to submit to such authority. I mean the *Scripture proofs* that are brought forward in the Confession of Faith in support of the doctrines it contains, and are put down at the bottom of the page, in proof that such doctrines are according to the *express word of God*. Persons oftentimes find a great deal of fault with Presbyterians, because they believe in the sovereign purposes of God, in predestination, election, the trinity, the atonement, effectual calling or regeneration, and the perseverance of the saints. But they should remember that we are not called upon to believe that which is according to fallen human nature, or our perverted reason. We are simply called upon to believe what God has revealed. His will must be absolute and imperative. It is not asserted that we are to believe that which is contrary to the first principles of right reason, or that which is absurd. A doctrine may be opposed to our natural inclinations, and *above* our reason, while it may be for our best happiness and ex-

actly according to the Scriptures. If any man will take the trouble to examine all our doctrines in order, and take even the *most exceptionable* of them, and compare them with the word of God that is laid down in support of them, he will find, if any thing, that these Scriptures are much *stronger* than any language in our Confession of Faith. Take, for instance, the following, in relation to the sovereign purposes of God.

Psalm xxxiii. 11. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Prov. xix. 21. There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. Isa. xlv. 10. I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure. Acts ii. 23. Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Acts iv. 28. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. Romans viii. 29, 30. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. Romans ix. 14. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will, he hardeneth. Thou wilt then say unto me, *why* doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will? Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us whom he hath called, not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles?

But these are not a *tithe* of the Scriptures that might be adduced of a similar nature. We believe such doctrines, therefore, because God has *revealed* them, and because, so far as our Christian knowledge and our religious experience extend, we find them calculated to promote our edification and our best happiness. The man who finds fault with them, is respectfully requested to try and see if he can make the Holy Scriptures speak any thing *milder* than what our Confession of Faith contains. We will always find the best way to answer such persons, is, to refer them to what *God* says, and if *that* will not satisfy them, we may be certain that all *our* arguments, that all that we can say, will be of no avail. A shorter and smoother confession of our faith might be more palatable to multitudes, and our churches might be far more numerous. But this would not be honest or right: it would not be a *confession* of our faith, and it would be most justly offensive to every candid man, and to a pure and holy God.

A notice of the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, compiled by the Westminster Assembly, might here be taken with great propriety. These invaluable manuals of instruction were drawn up with the greatest care and perspicuity, and they have been the means of unfolding the precious doctrines of the Bible to millions of the rising generation. If there is any fault to be found with them, it cannot be on the score of doctrinal instruction; that is most ample and satisfactory. It might, however, have tended to the promotion of the truth, had these catechisms also been as full and explicit on the constitution and government of the Christian church, as they are upon the leading doctrines of the Scriptures. It is to be feared there are too many Presbyterians who are not so well acquainted with their form of government, and with the reasons why they *are* Presbyterians, as they should be. We shall, however, dismiss this subject at present, and proceed to consider in the next place, that form of church government which was presented by the Westminster Assembly, and which is now in general use in all Presbyterian churches.

This is admitted to be a secondary matter, but by no means a matter of no importance. We believe it to be in accordance with the Scriptures and with reason, that the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles should lay down at least the *general* principles of church government. The Church is a visible body, and as such sustains many relations, and has many duties to perform. It would be strange indeed, therefore, if the Scriptures were silent about such a matter,

and did not give us a somewhat particular account of the organization of the early Christian churches. And if the Scriptures reveal a definite plan, surely no man has a right to set up another, or to follow that which may please his fancy. The four kinds of church government that have prevailed, like the four kinds of civil government among men, have been divided into monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, and republicanism. A church monarchy is, where one man is at the head of the Church, as the Pope of Rome, who is the head and ruler of the Roman Catholic Church. A church aristocracy is, where the power of church government and ordination is in the hands of diocesan bishops or prelates, as in the Episcopal Church of England, the Episcopal and Methodist Episcopal Churches in the United States. A church democracy is, where the church government is altogether in the members of each separate and independent congregation, as among the Congregationalists and the Baptists of England and the United States. A church republicanism is, where the church government is in the hands of the *chosen representatives* of each congregation, and of *all* the other churches of the same denomination within a certain territory, as among all the various Presbyterian churches in the world. Without stopping to examine all these various forms of church government, we will merely present for your consideration at this time, some of the features of Presbyterianism or church republicanism. It may not be amiss, however, to remark, as we live under a *political* republicanism, and glory in our inestimable privileges and blessings, it is rather strange that a *Christian* should be more solicitous about his *political* government, than about his *church* government! It is a great mistake to suppose our *religious* liberties have no influence on our *political* liberties. The former generally govern the latter, at least they ought to, and it has seldom or never been the case, that any nation has enjoyed much political liberty, that has not, at the same time, possessed a large share of religious liberty. The two things are inseparable. The church has been *cursed*, and almost *ruined* for ever, by the usurpation and complete spiritual despotism of her professed ministers and members. Even *good* men are *but* men, and they should never have too much power in their hands. Let the people ever remember, in *church*, as well as in state, that "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance."

The principal features of Presbyterian Church government are the following: 1st. The perfect authoritative and ministerial equality of all ministers of the gospel, who are called

Bishops, Pastors, Presbyters and Ministers. 2d. That in each church there should be a body of Ruling Elders, chosen by the members of the church from their own number, to take part with the Bishop in the admission of members, and in the general government of the church. 3d. That there should also be a body of Deacons, chosen in the same manner, to take care of the wants of the poor, and to whom also may be committed the temporal affairs of each congregation. 4th. A succession of Church Courts, composed of Bishops and Ruling Elders, for the administration of discipline, and for the advancement and general welfare of the Church of Christ. 5th. That all church government originates with the *people of God*, that is—that they are to elect, by their own free and deliberate choice, all their officers—their Bishop, their Ruling Elders, their Deacons, and whatever other persons they may desire to transact their business.

Presbyterians maintain the *parity* or *equality* of Bishops, Pastors, Presbyters and Ministers, in opposition to the claims of the Pope, and Diocesan Bishops or Prelates—first from the words of Jesus Christ himself to his apostles, in Matthew xx. 25, where it seems the mother of two of his disciples had desired Jesus to place her two sons, one on his right, and the other on his left hand, in the kingdom of Heaven. “But Jesus called them unto him and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. *But it shall not be so with you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister: And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.*” Nothing can be more conclusive. The parity of Bishops, Pastors, Presbyters and Ministers, is again very evident from the *interchangeable use of all these names* in various places of the New Testament. Hence the Bishop or Presbyter is the highest permanent office in the Christian Church, and we therefore find the Presbytery or a collection of presbyters, or ministers, with the Apostle Paul as their Moderator, ordaining Timothy to the work of the ministry, and to the office of a Bishop, “with the laying on the hands of the Presbytery.” Hence also from the words Presbyter, and Presbytery, comes the name *Presbyterian*, and that form of Church government known as Presbyterian Church government.

In support of the parity of the ministry, from the interchangeable use of the name bishop, pastor, and such like, one or two passages of Scripture alone will be presented. In Acts xx. 17, Paul is said to have sent for the *πρεσβυτερος*

—the Presbyters of the Church of Ephesus. In the 28th verse of this chapter, in his address to these same persons, he calls them *ἐπισκοπους*—Bishops, and he commands them to feed the Church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood. There is another passage in 1 Peter v. 1, 2, which is as plain and equally conclusive. This apostle addressed the *πρεσβυτερος*—the Presbyters, and exhorted them to the proper performance of their duties toward the flock of God which was among them, *ἐπισκοπουντες*—exercising the office and performing the duties of a Bishop. It is very evident, that out of the *four* instances in the New Testament, in which the name bishop is applied to ministers, *three* of them, at least, apply to Presbyters likewise. Indeed, at the time of the Reformation, and for nearly a hundred years afterwards, every Reformed Church, except the English Church, and nearly every eminent protestant, had renounced the pretensions and corruptions of the Romish hierarchy as unscriptural and destructive of the piety and liberties of the Christian Church. And even in England, the hierarchy was principally retained, because it was supposed to be better adapted to monarchical and aristocratical institutions. The perfect ministerial parity, and divine authority of all ministers of the gospel, was universally admitted; and a large number of the most eminent ministers entered the English Church, with none other than Presbyterian ordination. It is well known, that the popish and exclusive claims of the hierarchy were never advanced until Dr. Bancroft, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, first proclaimed them in a sermon in 1588. The intolerance and persecution which naturally followed from these principles, eventually led to the subversion of the monarchy and hierarchy under Charles I.: and should Puseyism or Oxford popery and bigotry continue to increase in England and this country as they have for the last several years, these same principles will again meet with another overthrow somewhat more fatal and final. In relation to the scriptural argument for the parity of all ministers of the gospel, many of the most eminent Bishops and others in the Episcopal Church, have candidly admitted, in the language of Bishop Onderdonk of Pennsylvania, “that the name bishop which now designates the highest grade of the ministry, *is not appropriated to this office in scripture*. That name is given to the middle order, or presbyters, and ALL THAT WE READ IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CONCERNING BISHOPS IS TO BE REGARDED AS PERTAINING TO THIS MIDDLE GRADE.” It follows, therefore, from this examination, and from such ad-

mission, that Jesus Christ never intended to have more than *one* grade or order of ministers; and that, if the *scripture* ground is abandoned, and recourse is had to "tradition" and the "fathers," the Babel structure of Popery may easily be raised again with all its folly and impiety.

In relation to Ruling Elders, we find the Apostles in Acts xiv. 23, "ordained them elders in every church," and it is incredible to suppose they were all *preachers*, because, in the first place, so many could not be spared for each church; the work was great and pressing: and even if they could have been spared, it is by no means desirable to have so many ministers in *one* congregation. In 1 Tim. iv. 17, we have one text, at least, that is to the purpose and conclusive, "Let the elders that *rule* well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they that labour in the word and doctrine." Here it is distinctly stated, that there is a class of *ruling* elders as well as of teaching elders—for the word presbyter sometimes means one and sometimes another. The absolute necessity for some such class of persons in every church, is manifest from the employment of vestrymen, church wardens, deacons, and committee-men in other denominations. Scriptural authority for such an office is far more reasonable and is preferable.

Of the appointment of Deacons, in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, to take care of the poor, there can be no dispute. I know it is alleged, that deacons sometimes preached: but we have known men who were formerly deacons, and ruling elders, who are now preachers of the gospel. But they are not ministers *because* they were once deacons and elders, but because they "purchased to themselves a good degree" by their exemplary conduct and their abilities, and have been set apart to the gospel ministry. The *reasons* the Apostles gave for their election are, that they might have charge of the poor while the Apostles themselves would devote all their time to the proclamation of the gospel. No man can suppose, therefore, that the Apostles would immediately turn round and set these same men to preaching. If they had needed more preachers, they would doubtless have been appointed as such. But making preachers out of deacons, is only of a piece with all the other corruptions that overran all the early Christian Church, and ended in the absolute dominion and despotism of the Pope, the suppression of the Bible, and the general ignorance and superstition of the once glorious Church of Jesus Christ. The Christian Church was never intended to be modeled after the Temple service, but after the Jewish Synagogue

constitution, in the time of our Saviour, as is most manifest. There each synagogue had its Bishop or Pastor, its Bench of Ruling Elders, and its Deacons. This is just what you find in every well regulated Presbyterian church.

But even if there can be no scripture found for such a form of Church government, it is certainly far more *republican* than any other, and more fully secures the rights and liberties of the people: as will be very plain from a consideration of the fourth feature of Presbyterianism—and that is, our succession of Church Courts, composed of Bishops and Ruling Elders. There is, 1st. The Church Session, composed of the Bishops and Ruling Elders of each Church. 2d. All the Ministers and one Ruling Elder from each congregation in a certain district, who usually meet twice in the year, and are called the Presbytery. 3d. All the Ministers and one Ruling Elder from each congregation of several Presbyteries united, who usually meet once a year, and are called a Synod. 4th. The General Assembly composed of an equal number of Bishops and Ruling Elders from each Presbytery, who usually meet once a year.

You will thus perceive, there is a *unity* and *efficiency* secured by this government, and that the *rights* of the humblest member of the Presbyterian Church, are fully secured; for like the civil courts of this country, he can carry his real or imaginary grievances from the lowest to the highest tribunal in the Church. But this justice cannot be obtained with so much certainty, when the government of the Church is in the hands of a pope, or diocesan bishop, or a single congregation. A man may be unjustly treated by *all* these authorities and he can have no redress. And power concentrated in the hands of such *few* persons, sooner or later leads to corruption and injustice.

But the last and crowning excellence of the Presbyterian form of Church government, is her *free and full election of all her officers*, first and last, by the voluntary *choice* of the *people*. We believe that Jesus Christ came into the world to destroy all sin, corruption, and oppression in every form—to make mankind a family of brethren, and to secure the rights and liberties of all—and that therefore, first of all, in his Church, we should expect to find *liberty* and *justice*. The constitution of the early Church entirely confirms this doctrine. There we find the people *choosing*, and the General Assembly at Jerusalem, composed of the Apostles, Elders, and brethren, as the highest court of appeals, hearing and settling all difficulties, and securing to each member and each church their respective rights and privileges.

This same result will always take place wherever the people are *allowed* to choose their spiritual rulers, and where there is such a succession of Church Courts as is to be found in the Presbyterian Church. And in this *republican* country, it is often a matter of profound astonishment to see the *indifference* of multitudes of Christians to that form of Church government under which they are willing to live. If the liberties of these same men in *political* matters should be invaded to a like extent, they would take up *arms* to a man, for their immediate defence. Surely their *religion* is worth more than their *politics*.

IV. A particular examination of the excellencies and liberal tendencies of the Discipline and Directory for Worship in the Presbyterian Church, might here be entered into with much advantage: but we wish to hasten to consider in the *fourth* and last place, the *moral* and *political* influence of Presbyterianism.

A few words, however, in relation to the Discipline and Directory may not be amiss. The importance and proper administration of discipline in the Church of Christ, is intimately connected with her purity and prosperity. In the Discipline of the Presbyterian Church, there is a scriptural, judicious, and ample arrangement provided for the settlement of all matters in dispute, and every opportunity is afforded that perfect justice may be done to all. A mere reference to this branch of our investigations is all that is necessary. But in relation to the Directory for Worship something more is demanded. You will perceive that it is a mere *directory* and not an absolute *form* for the worship of God. The reasons for this are plain and obvious. The intention of Christianity is, to bring man into an intimate communion with his God, to secure and call out the convictions of his mind, and the feelings and affections of his heart. Hence the public and private worship of God is natural, reasonable, and scriptural. To the end, however, that all things may "be done decently and in order," and "to edifying," it is important to have some general idea and arrangement of those exercises in which we are to engage. A simple *directory*, therefore, seems to be all that can be desirable. We are thus led to exercise our mental and spiritual faculties, the mind is instructed, and the soul naturally pours forth its petitions to the God of all grace and consolation, according to its ever varying wants and situation. Nothing can be more natural and beautiful. No set forms of worship can ever be so effectual. They do not call into exercise the active powers of the mind and feelings

of the heart; but are rather calculated to promote indifference and formality, and must therefore be eminently prejudicial to the development and growth of Christian knowledge and genuine piety. They cannot be varied according to times and circumstances, but must always be followed with undeviating scrupulosity. The great beauty and excellence of preaching, prayer, and such like, is their *adaptedness* to our present circumstances: and it would be just as reasonable, and as well calculated to promote our edification and spirituality, to preach the same sermons every Sabbath, as to read the same prayers. A man may follow a liturgy with constant uniformity, but if his *heart* is not affected, he cannot long endure to follow a directory: and this may be the great reason why so many of the gay and fashionable have ever loved a splendid ritual, that called for no exertion, and which at the same time seemed to offer the devotional exercises of the mind and heart. A precomposed form may sometimes be useful to a novice in religious matters, in the same manner that a "horn-book" may be useful to children. A precomposed form may sometimes, also, be prepared and used for a particular occasion; but no man in the exercise of his senses would ever use crutches who could walk without them. It is puerile and absurd to suppose that a man of piety and common sense, a man who has been converted by the Spirit of God, should be compelled to use a prescribed form in all his public and private worship from week to week and from year to year. And a minister of the gospel who cannot lead the devotions of God's people without a service-book before him, cannot surely be fit to preach to them the gospel of Jesus Christ. The examples of Christ and his apostles are the source from whence our directory is derived. We find them reading the Scriptures, expounding them, preaching, praying, singing the praises of God, and administering those ordinances peculiar to the Christian Church. But we nowhere find that they composed or followed any *set form* of religious exercises. There is not even the most *distant allusion* to any thing like a settled form of public or private worship. An apostolic prayer-book would be something of a curiosity! Our Saviour did, indeed, give his disciples a *model* of prayer, that their petitions might be simple, to the purpose, and from the *heart*. This is the sum total of apostolic liturgies, and it would have been a happy circumstance if all others had been as short, as simple and evangelical. Our scriptural directory merely points out the important parts of public and private worship, and some-

thing of the manner in which they ought to be observed. It does not confine one in "leading-strings," as Bishop Wilkins expresses it; and neither does it make a Christian or a minister of Jesus a mere automaton, to read over the prescriptions of "popes" or "bishops," as the case may be, without the least liberty to use his Christian sense and freedom, as the "ambassador" of the King of kings. The most enlarged Christian liberty, and at the same time the closest adherence to apostolic usage, are thus secured by our admirable directory.

From our examinations to-day, and from the well known history of Presbyterianism, it is clear that the moral and political influence of our doctrines and form of government, has been most salutary and immensely great for the spiritual and temporal welfare of mankind. It would be impossible for it to have been otherwise. Our doctrines and government were resuscitated from the darkness of popery by the illustrious Reformers of the sixteenth century, and covered Europe with a flood of light. The moral and political relations of Germany were improved and elevated. The republicanism of Switzerland was firmly established, and Geneva under the immediate influence of Calvin, was regenerated and made the most renowned city in Europe. Scotland was delivered from popery under Knox, and is to this day one of the most moral, learned, enlightened, and conspicuous nations in the world. Presbyterianism has converted every mountain and hill into a citadel of truth, and the moral heroism of Chalmers and the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, proves that her religious principles are from *God*, and above the corroding power of gold, and fearless of the pains and penalties of political oppression. We have just heard that they have renounced their Established Church because they were denied their liberties, and because they were determined to be free. No other established Church in the world would have done the same! What a tribute to their stern integrity and to the inestimable value of their principles!

England was saved from the second dominion of popery and despotism, by the Puritans and Covenanters; and justly owes all her real liberties to these same despised but indomitable men. And never let it be forgotten, that the nearest approximation England has ever made to sound constitutional principles, and genuine freedom, was at the time of the English Commonwealth, when the Puritans and their friends exerted their greatest influence. But in America, in our own land, we behold the legitimate influence of

Presbyterian principles. To this land our fathers fled from England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Holland, and France. Here we find the complete development of their principles in church and state. None but *ecclesiastical* republicans could ever have formed the political organization of this immense Republic. South America is but a chaos of Republics—so called—and simply because they are Roman Catholics. But here the democratic republicanism of Presbyterianism is fully carried out in all its parts. There is, indeed, a most striking and beautiful similarity in the structure and administration of our ecclesiastical and political constitutions. Our church session answers to the township, the presbytery to the county, the synod to the state, and the General Assembly to the national government of the United States. It is well known that the Presbyterians of this country at the time of the American revolution were almost universally "Whigs." This very church, this very ground, and many of your own fathers, were consecrated to that sacred struggle. Within these walls were lodged the prisoner enemies of our country taken at the battle of Trenton; and here were gathered, at that memorable crisis, "the father of his country" and his confederates in the cause of freedom. Many of our ministers and ruling elders were members of Congress, chaplains in the army, and commanders on the field of battle. The celebrated Dr. John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister, and President of the College of New Jersey, was long a distinguished member of Congress, earnestly advocated and signed the Declaration of Independence, and very materially assisted in the formation of the constitutional liberties of the United States. He ranked among Washington, Adams, Franklin and Jefferson. More than a year before the declaration of our independence, the Presbyterians of this country anticipated that great movement, and issued a pastoral letter to their congregations in which they advocated the justice of our cause, and gave suitable instructions to their people who might be called to defend their liberties from the assaults of British tyranny. At the close of the war they addressed another letter to their people, in which they wrote, "We cannot help congratulating you on the general and almost universal attachment of the Presbyterian body to the cause of liberty and the rights of mankind. This has been visible in their conduct, and has been confessed by the complaints and resentment of the common enemy. Such a circumstance ought not only to afford us satisfaction on the review, as bringing credit on the body in

general, but to increase our gratitude to God for the happy issue of the war. Had it been unsuccessful, we must have drunk deeply of the cup of suffering. Our burnt and wasted churches, and our plundered dwellings, in such places as fell under the power of our adversaries, are but an earnest of what we must have suffered, had they finally prevailed." At the time of the revolutionary war, the advocates of the government in England, openly maintained that "the Presbyterians have been the chief and principal instruments in all these flaming measures; and they always do, and ever will act against government, from that restless and turbulent anti-monarchical spirit which has always distinguished them every where;" and they therefore unhesitatingly fixed "the blame of all these extraordinary American proceedings on them." This was the reason why our ministers were shot, our churches turned into stables and burnt, and our people plundered and murdered. In the eloquent language of the Rev. Dr. Murray, of New Jersey: "If ever the great principles which led to our revolution are fairly canvassed, and the causes which, amid so many discouragements, led us on to triumph, are fairly stated, it will be found that our faith and its teachers had much to do in obtaining our liberty. The blood of our people has stained, and their bones have bleached on, every battle-field of our country. If papacy or prelacy had prevailed in our land, our now free States would be provinces of Great Britain to the present hour. Withdraw from this land all the civil benefits which it has derived from the pilgrim and Presbyterian fathers, and the remainder would be scarcely worth the possessing." Similar to this, also, is the testimony of William B. Reed, Esq., himself an Episcopalian, and an eminent member of the Philadelphia bar: "A Presbyterian loyalist," says he, "was a thing unheard of. Patriotic clergymen of the established Church, were exceptions to general conduct; for while they were patriots at a sacrifice, and in spite of restraints and imaginary obligations, which many found it impossible to disregard, it was natural sympathy and voluntary action that placed the dissenters under the banner of revolutionary redress. It is a sober judgment, that cannot be questioned, that had independence and its maintenance depended on the approval and ready sanction of the colonial clergy, misrule and oppression must have become far more intense, before they would have seen a case of justifiable rebellion. The debt of gratitude which independent America owes to the dissenting clergy and laity, never can be paid."

We wish it here, also, to be borne in mind and never to

be forgotten, that the Presbyterians of this country made the first successful movement to bring about the separation of the church from the state. It has been common, in many places, to accuse the Presbyterians of a desire and a determination to unite the church with the state. But such accusations are groundless, unjust, and slanderous. Our fathers fled to this country to escape the allied domination of the state and the church. The evil, however, followed them. But their history is identified with constant opposition to any such coalition; and in 1784, in Virginia, after having sent many petitions and remonstrances to the legislature of that state, they sent another petition with *ten thousand signatures*; and the Rev. John B. Smith, an eminent Presbyterian minister of that time, who drew up the petition, was heard for *three successive days* at the bar of the legislature, in defence of their principles. Episcopacy had been the established religion before the Revolution, and now a bill establishing Episcopacy had passed two readings, and was about to become a law; but this energetic and eloquent movement sealed for ever, we devoutly hope, the separation of the church from the state in this land of freedom. The Presbyterians had suffered much from this cause in Virginia, New York, and other colonies. Virginia was then the leading state in the confederacy, and her example was soon followed by the others, until the separation became universal. And God forbid that we should ever desire to have it restored! It is pernicious and injurious in the extreme to all concerned.

Such, therefore, has ever been, and such will ever continue to be the moral and political influence of our Christian doctrines and church government. Presbyterianism has ever been identified with pure religion, plainness and simplicity of worship, solid learning, uncompromising integrity, and a steadfast advocacy of the religious and civil liberties of mankind. Millions, this day, in both hemispheres, rejoice in the possession of these invaluable blessings. And surely, then, we have abundant cause for such a devout commemoration as this! Were we not to remember in this public and peculiar manner, the principles and the men from whom, under God, we have derived all our blessings, we would be unworthy to be called their children, to bear their name, or to occupy their inheritance.

But, O! how solemn this commemoration to-day! From this mount of privileges we look back upon two hundred years past! Many of these illustrious men were persecuted; some languished in prison, and others were laid in gory

graves: but we have the most cheering evidence to believe that they all died in the triumphs of faith, and that they are now in glory. Their principles have spread, and now give happiness to exulting millions. We look forward to another hundred years! Ah! what changes must we not expect! And often, as your preacher mused upon the past, while he was preparing this discourse, did he remember, that, long before the next hundred years shall pass away, he and this congregation will be numbered with the dead; that his tongue will be stilled for ever, and that you, my hearers, will be sleeping with him, with the unnumbered congregation of the departed dead! The green grass that waves over their heads, and the simple tablet that marks the place of their repose, may be all to tell that we have ever lived on earth. O, then, let us not fail in obtaining the grace of God, but through faith and patience inherit the promises of everlasting life! Let us love our heavenly principles a thousand times more, and strive with a holy zeal to diffuse them, even among the nations of the uttermost parts of the earth. Let us so live, that when our children's children shall meet to commemorate the next hundredth anniversary of the meeting of our venerated fathers, they may have the most abundant cause to say of them and of us, as did the Psalmist of old, in the language of the text—"Surely he shall not be moved for ever; the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance."

THE END.